

Although he fought for more, U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop described the \$3.1 billion in drought relief aid approved by the House Thursday (2/13) as a "substantial" amount that can enable many farmers who have suffered severe weather-related crop losses to financially survive.

Drought and other extreme weather conditions have impacted more than 80 percent of the country's farm communities over the past two years, leaving many farm operations in a financial crisis and contributing to the economic instability in many rural communities.

The House approved the compromise \$397.4 billion 2003 Omnibus Appropriations Bill which includes new funding in a number of critical areas, including homeland defense, education, health care, and agriculture, and Senate action on the measure was expected Friday.

Along with a number of House members and Senators representing farming areas, Representative Bishop pushed for \$5.9 billion in emergency farm disaster aid. Based on the level of crop damage nationwide, the Georgia lawmaker said he believed the higher figure would have ensured that a sufficient level of help would be available for all farmers who suffered severe losses. However, he said the compromise figure would provide a substantial level of relief.

"We've been fighting to secure a meaningful level of disaster assistance for farmers who are struggling to survive since last year, and for awhile it looked as if we might end up with nothing," the Second District Congressman said. "While I would have preferred more, I was pleased we were finally able to secure the \$3.1 billion, which is a substantial amount."

The disaster package will provide payments to producers based on a loss of 35 percent or greater. The payments will be based on the national crop average for each crop, with producers with crop insurance receiving 50 percent of the national average and those without 45 percent.